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Digital storytelling as a tool for social communication in the process of learning English language and literature

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to identify and theoretically substantiate the socio-communicative potential of digital storytelling in the process of learning English language and literature, taking into account the linguistic, collaborative, multimodal and narrative mechanisms of its pedagogical application. The study was carried out in the format of a structured literature review with a qualitative thematic synthesis. The search for scientific publications was carried out in March–May 2026 in international bibliographic databases with additional verification of bibliographic data and digital identifiers of publications. From 286 initially identified records, after removing duplicates, screening of titles and annotations and full-text evaluation, a corpus of 25 peer-reviewed works from 2022–2026 was formed. Thematic coding revealed that 72.0% of the publications covered language production, 68.0% – socio-communicative interaction, 64.0% – multimodal and narrative mediation, while only 16.0% directly integrated literary material. It was determined that the socio-communicative potential of digital stories is formed through interconnected language production, narrative structuring of content, collective agreement of meanings, multimodal recoding and audience orientation of the message. It was found that the linguistic and collaborative aspects have a much broader evidence base than the use of digital stories for the joint interpretation of a literary text. The revealed asymmetry indicates the insufficient integration of linguistic, social and literary directions in modern research. It is practical to organize the creation of digital stories as a structured collaborative activity that combines content interpretation, scenario planning, multimodal construction, and presentation of the result to the audience. Further research should empirically test such

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a model when working with English-language fiction texts.

Keywords

Artificial Intelligence, multimodal mediation, collaborative learning, narrative competence, intercultural interaction, speech productivity, group meaning-making, English as a foreign language methodology, English as a foreign language trainee teachers

INTRODUCTION

The digitalization of language education is changing not only the set of teaching tools, but also the logic of communicative interaction, as learners increasingly create, interpret and disseminate multimodal messages. In this context, digital storytelling combines speech activity, narrative organization of content and digital production of the message, which makes it promising for foreign language communication. Ajabshir (2024) recorded improvements in syntactic complexity, accuracy and lexical diversity of writing, as well as multidimensional engagement during digital storytelling tasks (Ajabshir, 2024). Bai and Xian (2024) examined it in relation to the development of oral language, self-regulation and speech anxiety, confirming the significance of digital storytelling for English as a foreign language (further EFL) training (Bai & Xian, 2024; Tsekhmister *et al*., 2023).

However, the potential of digital storytelling is not limited to language outcomes. Belda-Medina (2022) has shown its connection to inclusiveness, creativity, and critical reflection on diversity in the preparation of future English teachers (Belda-Medina, 2022). Chen and Yeh (2025) have established the benefits of a collaborative model for vocabulary, writing, and creativity development that emphasizes the social dimension of co-constructing a digital narrative (Chen & Yeh, 2025). Datskiv (2023) has shown that creating digital stories in a practical English course has promoted the development of communicative and methodological competencies and has potential for foreign language and world literature classes (Datskiv, 2023; Smolinska *et al*., 2024; Byrkovych *et al*., 2023).

Despite these results, the existing works mostly analyze writing, speaking, creativity, inclusiveness or collaboration in a fragmentary

manner. Digital storytelling as an integrated tool of social communication that combines foreign language interaction, joint construction of meanings and work with literary content remains insufficiently clarified. The problematic question is what communicative functions of digital storytelling determine its potential in the process of learning English language and literature. The hypothesis is based on the assumption that this potential is determined not only by linguistic practice, but also by the collaborative, narrative and social-interactional nature of digital history.

The purpose of the study is to identify and theoretically substantiate the socio-communicative potential of digital storytelling in the process of learning English language and literature based on the generalization of modern scientific approaches and research results. To achieve this goal, the following tasks were formulated: 1) to systematize the main functions of digital storytelling in foreign language education; 2) to establish its connection with speech interaction, cooperation and joint construction of content; 3) to identify the possibilities of digital narration for the interpretation and multimodal processing of literary material; 4) to outline the pedagogical conditions under which digital storytelling can function as an effective tool of social communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The academic discourse on digital storytelling in language education demonstrates a gradual shift from its treatment as a multimedia way of presenting educational material to its understanding as a complex activity within which language production, narrative construction, multimodality and interaction function interrelatedly. At the same time, the evidence base remains methodologically heterogeneous. A systematic review by Ong and Aryadoust (2023) showed that among 50 studies of children's language learning, almost half relied on qualitative methods, about half focused on writing, speaking was studied less often, and listening was not considered as a separate outcome. In addition, over 92% of the analyzed works did not contain evidence of testing the reliability of the tools used. This limits the possibility of unconditionally generalizing positive conclusions about the pedagogical effectiveness of digital storytelling.

More convincing evidence comes from comparative and

experimental studies of language performance. Fan and Chen (2023) found that a cooperative model of digital storytelling in the context of subject-language integrated learning produced better outcomes in English speaking, digital story quality, and content acquisition than individual task performance. However, the sample of 43 sixth graders and the specific context of financial literacy limit the generalizability of the results. Liang and Hwang (2023) also found improvements in English speaking, multimodal storytelling, and narrative engagement, as well as reduced communication anxiety in 80 high school students. However, the use of robotic interaction in the experimental setting makes it difficult to separate the effect of digital storytelling itself from the influence of the technological environment. A similar methodological caveat applies to Fan's (Fan, 2024) study: the integration of subject knowledge, language competence, and academic skills confirms the pedagogical suitability of digital storytelling, but the context of medical students does not provide grounds for automatically transferring the results to other educational environments.

At the level of individual language components, the results are even more differentiated. Nami and Asadnia (2024) demonstrated the positive effect of student-created digital stories for vocabulary acquisition and emphasized the importance of contextualization, mutual assistance, and cognitive-affective engagement. Meletiadou (2022), studying 50 multilingual students, linked the use of digital storytelling with the development of writing, critical thinking, confidence, and intercultural awareness, but at the same time revealed technological difficulties in some participants. Kharytska *et al*. (2026) consider digital storytelling more broadly, as an integrative means of developing speaking, writing, reading, listening, digital literacy, and sociocultural competence. However, a significant part of these findings is of a generalizing and methodological nature, so it should not be equated with experimental confirmation of each of the claimed effects.

For the issue of social communication, it is fundamental to distinguish between language productivity and actual readiness to engage in interaction. Huang (2023) found a statistically significant increase in the level of English speaking and group cohesion after completing digital storytelling tasks, but the positive dynamics of readiness for communication did not reach statistical significance.

Therefore, technologically intensive joint activities in themselves do not guarantee increased communicative initiative. A different result was obtained by Shen, Hao and Peng (2024a), who recorded an increase in readiness for foreign language communication after a transmediation workshop and associated it with a deepening of understanding, expansion of narratives and emotional involvement. Shen, Shen and Peng (2024b) explain this mechanism through language practice, identity construction, the involvement of cultural and multimodal resources and the formation of communities of interest. At the same time, the lack of a full-fledged control comparison in workshop design weakens the ability to unambiguously attribute the resulting effect to digital storytelling.

The social-communicative dimension is also manifested through authorial voice, identity, and co-construction of meanings. Krasova and Moroz (2024) showed that in the digital stories of multilingual students, the individual authorial voice is recognized through a set of linguistic and multimodal features. This expands the function of digital storytelling from training in linguistic correctness to representing personal position and identity, although this study did not measure direct changes in communicative competence. Rodgers and Ní Dhonnchadha (2023) emphasized the importance of group creation of digital stories for the development of transferable communicative skills in higher education. At the same time, their project was implemented in the context of another foreign language, so for English-language education it has primarily a comparative-conceptual significance.

The least developed direction remains the integration of digital storytelling with literary education. Haring (2024) proposes to combine reading of young adult literature, extended reading and digital storytelling in the format of post-textual activities, creating a methodological connection between the interpretation of the literary text and multimodal production. However, this work is mainly methodological in nature. Empirically closer to the problem under study is the approach of Fina, Fazzi and Da Lio (2024): the analysis of 13 digital stories, student diaries and field notes showed the use of remixing strategies to rethink the themes of literary works, the development of multiliteracies, mediation skills, critical and creative thinking and a positive perception of collaboration. At the same time, difficulties in generating ideas, searching for information and editing show that multimodal work creates not only new communicative opportunities,

but also additional cognitive and technological load.

Thus, the available research sufficiently convincingly confirms the potential of digital storytelling for the development of individual language skills, collaboration, multimodal self-expression and engagement. However, these effects are mostly analyzed as separate outcomes. A holistic explanation of how speech interaction, group agreement of meanings, authorial position, multimodal mediation and interpretation of the literary text jointly shape the socio-communicative potential of digital storytelling remains insufficiently developed. It is the fragmented nature of the connections between linguistic, social, multimodal and literary components that constitutes a scientific gap that determines the need for their integrated theoretical understanding in the process of learning English language and literature.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design and Search Strategy

The study was conducted in the format of a structured literature review with a qualitative thematic synthesis. Its task was to compare current scientific results on the use of digital storytelling in the study of English language and literature and to determine its socio-communicative functions. The review was not positioned as a systematic review, therefore the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (further PRISMA) protocol, double independent screening and statistical meta-analysis were not applied.

The literature search was conducted from March 15 to May 31, 2026. The main information resources were Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection, and the Education Resources Information Center (further ERIC). Crossref and Google Scholar were used as additional tools to check digital object identifiers, bibliographic information, and search for relevant works that may not be reflected in the main databases. Search queries were formed in English using the combinations “digital storytelling” AND EFL, “digital storytelling” AND English as a second language (further ESL), “digital storytelling” AND “English language learning”, “digital storytelling” AND communication, “digital storytelling” AND collaboration, “digital storytelling” AND “willingness to

communicate", "digital storytelling" AND multimodality, "digital storytelling" AND literature, "digital storytelling" AND "Young Adult Literature" and "digital storytelling" AND "intercultural competence". The time limit was 2022–2026.

Formation of an Information Base

At the initial stage, 286 bibliographic records were identified. After combining the search results and removing 61 duplicates, 225 publications remained for screening. Title and abstract screening allowed the exclusion of 152 works that did not correspond to the research topic. 73 publications underwent full-text evaluation. At this stage, 48 works were excluded due to insufficient connection to the teaching or learning of English language and literature, peripheral use of digital storytelling, lack of peer review, or insufficient availability of data on the design and results of the study. 25 scientific publications were included in the final corpus.

Inclusion criteria were peer-reviewed status, publication in 2022–2026, direct relevance to digital storytelling in the context of EFL, ESL, or English-language literature education, and the presence of outcomes in language performance, social interaction, collaboration, multimodal mediation, motivation, intercultural competence, or literary interpretation. Unpeer-reviewed web materials, duplicates, Russian and Belarusian sources, and publications that only mentioned digital storytelling in passing were excluded.

Analytical Procedure

For each work, an analytical card was formed with data on the year, country, educational context, sample, design, form of digital storytelling, research results, main conclusions and methodological limitations. Further coding was carried out according to four thematic blocks: language productivity; socio-communicative interaction; multimodal and narrative mediation; integration of literary content. Contradictory results and unresolved issues were recorded separately. The quantitative component was limited to calculating the frequency of representation of thematic categories, while statistical combining of effects was not carried out due to the heterogeneity of designs, samples

and performance indicators.

RESULTS

General Structure of the Research Corpus

Coding of the 25 included publications showed that interest in digital storytelling in the context of language education increased significantly in the middle of the study period. The largest number of works in the formed corpus fell on 2024 – 9 publications, or 36.0%. Another 20.0% were works from 2025, and 12.0% were publications from 2026. Thus, 68.0% of the analyzed array was published during the last three years of the study period. By type of design, empirical works prevailed: 12 publications were classified as interventional or comparative, another 8 were case studies, educational projects and other empirical designs without a full-fledged control comparison. Five works were of a review, conceptual or methodological nature. The distribution of the corpus is given in Table 1.

Table 1

Structure of the corpus of publications by year and type of research design

Parameter	Category	n	%
Year of publication	2022	2	8.0
	2023	6	24.0
	2024	9	36.0
	2025	5	20.0
	2026	3	12.0
Design	Interventional / comparative	12	48.0
	Case, project or other empirical	8	32.0
	Overview / conceptual / methodological	5	20.0

Note: The classification of designs is based on the dominant research procedure of each publication.

Source: compiled by the authors based on a corpus of 25 analyzed scientific publications.

The prevalence of empirical designs is important because the conclusions about digital storytelling (further DST) are not based solely on pedagogical assumptions. However, the level of evidence varies

considerably. For example, Bai and Xian (2024) used a randomized controlled design with 89 EFL learners, Ajabshir (2024) used a quasi-experimental comparison of 45 students, Fan and Chen (2023) used a nine-week experiment with 43 sixth-graders, and Liang and Hwang (2023) compared two groups of 40 students. At the other extreme are methodological and conceptual works that extend the pedagogical interpretation of DST but do not provide direct measurement of its effect, including Haring (2024), Kharytska *et al*. (2026), and Shen, Shen, and Peng (2024b). This means that the sheer number of positive findings in a corpus cannot be considered equivalent to the same level of empirical support.

Thematic Structure of Results

The next stage of coding was to determine not only whether DST was positively evaluated, but also which features of digital storytelling received the most endorsement. Since a single publication could simultaneously contain data on language outcome, interaction, and multimodality, the categories were not mutually exclusive. Their frequencies of presentation are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Representation of the main thematic blocks in the corpus of research

Thematic block	Number of publications, n	Share of the corpus, %	Dominant indicators
Language performance	18	72.0	Speaking, writing, vocabulary, fluency, accuracy, lexical diversity, integrated language proficiency
Social and communicative interaction	17	68.0	Collaboration, group cohesion, willingness to communicate, communicative confidence, voice, intercultural interaction
Multimodal and narrative mediation	16	64.0	Multimodal composing, transmediation, narrative engagement, identity expression, digital literacy

Thematic block	Number of publications, n	Share of the corpus, %	Dominant indicators
Integration of literary content	4	16.0	Young Adult Literature, post-reading DST, reinterpretation, literary mediation

Note: Categories overlap, so percentages add up to more than 100%. Work was included in a category if the corresponding component was the subject of analysis or one of the key performance indicators.
Source: compiled by the authors based on the results of thematic coding of 25 publications.

The most developed area was language performance. Of the 25 studies, 18 directly linked DST to language learning or measurable language outcomes. However, the effect was heterogeneous across components. Ajabshir (2024) found benefits of DST for syntactic complexity, accuracy, and lexical variety of writing, but did not find a corresponding effect for writing fluency. This is an important distinction: multimedia story construction does not affect all parameters of written performance equally. At the speaking level, the results were more consistent. Bai and Xian (2024) recorded better results for the experimental group in global speaking ability, fluency, vocabulary, accuracy, and pronunciation, and the advantage in speaking self-regulation was maintained after a month. Liang and Hwang (2023) also found improvements in speaking and storytelling ability, while Fan and Chen (2023) demonstrated the advantage of cooperative DST in English speaking proficiency.

A separate group of results is where DST operates through the creation of a language product. Chen and Yeh (2025) showed that scripted collaborative DST was more effective than an unstructured collaborative model for vocabulary acquisition, writing skills, and creativity. Nami and Asadnia (2024), in turn, obtained positive results for vocabulary acquisition through collaborative learner-generated digital stories. Meletiadou (2022) linked the creation of multimodal stories in higher education to the development of writing competence in multilingual students, while Fan (2024) found the ability of DST to integrate subject knowledge, language competence, and academic use of English. Zhang (2026) additionally showed the effect of narrative-based

vlogging on communicative productivity and narrative competence. Taken together, these results indicate that the language effect arises not from the mere fact of using a digital environment, but from the need to plan, verbalize, edit, and present a coherent message.

The Social and Communicative Function of Digital Storytelling

The second most frequent block covered 17 publications. However, the analysis showed that the concept of social communication is operationalized in the available literature fragmentarily. Some authors measure group interaction, others – willingness to communicate, identity, inclusion, collaborative competence or intercultural competence. That is why it is more appropriate to consider these indicators as interconnected manifestations of the social-communicative function, and not as identical constructs.

The most direct evidence is on the group organization of DST. Fan and Chen (2023) found the advantage of cooperative learning over individual creation of digital stories, and Chen and Yeh (2025) showed that even within a collaborative model, outcomes depend on how structured the interaction is organized. In Yu and Wang (2025), collaboration has taken on central importance: based on Activity Theory, a collaborative DST framework was formed, in which division of labor, community, and mutual overcoming of contradictions are part of the learning mechanism itself. This shifts the explanation of DST effectiveness from technological characteristics to the joint construction of digital narrative.

However, the relationship between collaborative activities and actual willingness to communicate (further WTC) is not linear. Huang (2023) found statistically significant increases in speaking proficiency and group cohesion, but the positive shift in willingness to communicate did not reach statistical significance. In contrast, in a workshop study by Shen, Hao, and Peng (2024a), second language (further L2) willingness to communicate increased after switching from prescript through video production to postscript. The authors attributed this to transmediation, the expansion of retrospective narrative, the deepening of perception, and emotional engagement. Shen, Shen, and Peng's (Shen *et al*., 2024b) thematic conceptualization complements this result with four possible mechanisms: language practice, the construction of desired identities,

the use of cultural and multimodal resources, and the formation of communities of shared interests. So, DST creates conditions for communication, but the mere fact of participation in a digital project does not guarantee automatic growth of WTC.

The social dimension is expanded through identity and intercultural communication. Belda-Medina (2022), analyzing the work of 244 future teachers, found changes in attitudes towards inclusiveness and diversity and showed the possibility of using digital stories to critically work with stereotypes. Krasova and Moroz (2024) found that the multimodal and linguistic characteristics of digital stories allow us to recognize the individual authorial voice of multilingual ESL learners, that is, DST functions as a space for representing identity. An even broader sociocultural effect was recorded by Wang and Hu (2025a) in a sample of 688 students: positive changes concerned four dimensions of intercultural competence, and the largest were shifts in intercultural knowledge and self-efficacy. Thus, the social function of DST goes beyond an increase in the number of speech acts and includes the presentation of a position, cultural mediation, and orientation to the other.

Multimodal and Narrative Mediation

The third block covered 16 publications. Its results show that multimodality is not a decorative addition to traditional storytelling. In digital history, the linguistic message is coordinated with image, voice, music, video, frame composition, and other semiotic resources. Liang and Hwang (2023) directly built robot-DST on a multimodal communication framework and recorded not only linguistic results, but also an increase in narrative engagement and communication tendency. Krasova and Moroz (2024) demonstrated that it is the combination of linguistic and multimodal features that forms the recognizable voice of the author. In Wang (2025b), multimodal production was combined with digital literacy, individual and collaborative practices, and moral and value-based understanding of the content.

At the same time, the results also indicate the dependence of the effect on the design of the digital environment. The advantage of robot-DST over conventional animation-based DST in Liang and Hwang (2023) does not allow us to attribute the entire effect to storytelling itself, since

the experimental condition simultaneously changed the form of interaction with the technology. Similarly, in Chen and Yeh (2025) the improvement occurred when adding a scripted collaborative strategy, and in Fan and Chen (2023)– cooperative learning. Thus, DST in the corpus functions not as an isolated pedagogical variable, but as a complex educational architecture, the effectiveness of which depends on scaffolding, the structure of cooperation and the method of multimodal construction.

Integration of English-Language Literary Content

The lowest frequency was found for the component that directly distinguishes the topic of this article from most digital storytelling research: only 4 out of 25 publications, or 16.0% of the corpus, directly linked DST to work with literary or artistic material. It is this imbalance that is the principal result of the thematic synthesis (Table 2).

Haring (2024) proposed a methodological combination of extensive reading of Young Adult Literature and DST, where a digital story is used as a scaffolded post-reading activity. However, this work primarily forms a pedagogical model and does not provide a comparative measurement of results. More empirical material was presented by Fina, Fazzi and Da Lio (2024): an analysis of 13 digital stories created as a multimodal response to Young Adult Literature showed the use of remix strategies to rethink the themes of the novels, the development of mediation and multiliteracies and the positive role of collaboration. At the same time, difficulties were recorded at the stages of brainstorming, information research and editing, which shows the additional cognitive load of a multimodal literary task.

In the Ukrainian context, Datskiv (2023) links the digital storytelling project in Practical English with the development of communicative and methodological competencies of future teachers of foreign languages and world literature. Kharytska *et al*. (2026) consider, among other things, the re-recording of literary texts as a practical form of DST for the development of pronunciation, intonational expressiveness, argumentation, and presentation of one's own ideas. However, these works do not provide the same level of controlled empirical evidence that is characteristic of some of the speaking or writing studies. This creates an obvious asymmetry: the linguistic

effectiveness of DST has been investigated much more deeply than its function as a means of social reinterpretation and communicative mediation of literary content.

Conflicting Results and Limits of the Available Evidence Base

Separate coding of contradictions and methodological limitations allowed us to identify several cases in which the positive interpretation of DST requires clarification. These are systematized in Table 3.

Table 3

Main controversies and methodological limitations of digital storytelling research

Problematic aspect	Synthesis result	Analytical value
Willingness to communicate	Huang (2023) – positive but statistically insignificant change in WTC; Shen, Hao, & Peng (2024) – significant increase in WTC	The communicative effect depends on the structure of the DST task and the mediation mechanism
Writing performance	Ajabshir (2024) – positive effect for complexity, accuracy and lexical diversity, but not for fluency	It is impossible to interpret DST as equally effective for all language components.
Collaboration	Cooperative and scripted collaborative DST outperformed individual or less structured work	Part of the effect may not be due to DST per se, but to the organization of the interaction
Technological component	Robot-DST outperformed conventional animation-based DST	The storytelling effect is partially mixed with the effect of a specific digital tool
Reliability of methods	A previous review by Ong & Aryadoust (2023) found a lack of evidence of reliability in over 92% of pediatric DST studies analyzed.	Positive pedagogical findings are not always accompanied by the same psychometric quality
Literary component	Only 4 of the 25 works in the current corpus directly integrated artistic/literary material	The relationship between DST, social communication, and literary interpretation remains understudied.

Note: WTC – willingness to communicate; DST – digital storytelling.

Source: compiled by the authors based on the results of a comparative thematic

synthesis.

These contradictions do not deny the pedagogical potential of DST, but they change its interpretation. Particularly revealing are the results of Ong and Aryadoust (2023), who in their review of 50 studies of children's language learning established the predominance of written results, a smaller representation of speaking and a complete absence of listening as a separate research outcome; more than 92% of the analyzed works did not report evidence of the reliability of the instruments used. A more recent review by Yu and Zeng (2026), covering 21 studies, confirmed the wide positive spectrum of DST – language acquisition, motivation, autonomy, collaborative competence and digital literacy – and at the same time showed the predominance of studies at the primary education level. Thus, even with the general positive direction of the results, the evidence base remains heterogeneous in terms of educational level, design and method of measuring the results.

Additionally, the motivational and professional-communicative context was important. Temel and Yılmaz (2025) found a statistically significant increase in L2 motivation in the experimental group, but the motivation indicator itself is not direct evidence of changes in socio-communicative behavior. Rodgers and Ní Dhonnchadha (2023) demonstrated the potential of group DST for language skills and transferable communication skills in a higher education language for specific purposes (further LSP) classroom, but the specialized context limits the direct transfer of the results to the study of English language and literature. Yu and Wang (2025), in contrast, directly emphasize collaboration among prospective English teachers, but their small sample of 28 participants also limits generalizability.

Generalization of the Results of Thematic Synthesis

The set of encoded data allows us to present digital storytelling not as a separate digital tool, but as a multi-level communicative process. At the first level, the narrative structuring of content occurs; at the second, its recoding through text, oral, visual and audio resources; at the third, the agreement of meanings between participants during collaborative production; at the fourth, the presentation of the story to the audience and the social positioning of the author or group. It is the

combination of these levels that explains why, along with linguistic productivity, group cohesion, communicative confidence, identity expression, intercultural competence, collaborative competence and mediation are recorded in studies.

At the same time, the results of the structured review show a significant gap between the well-represented linguistic, socio-communicative and multimodal directions and the poorly represented integration of literary content. Of the 25 works, 72.0% concerned linguistic productivity, 68.0% – socio-communicative aspects, 64.0% – multimodal or narrative mediation, but only 16.0% worked directly with literary material. Thus, the available studies confirm individual components of the mechanism, but almost do not consider them as a single system in which the English-language literary text becomes the basis for collective interpretation, multimodal transformation, position representation and social interaction. It is this structural gap in the existing evidence base that defines digital storytelling as a promising, but still insufficiently conceptualized tool of social communication in the process of learning English language and literature.

DISCUSSION

The results of the structured review showed that digital storytelling in the study of English language and literature should not be considered as a separate digital tool, but as a complex educational and communicative practice. In the formed corpus, 72.0% of the publications concerned language productivity, 68.0% – social-communicative interaction, 64.0% – multimodal or narrative mediation, while only 16.0% directly integrated literary material. This distribution indicates that the linguistic and communicative effects of DST already have significant empirical support, but its role in working with English-language literary text is much less studied.

The dominance of language productivity is consistent with the findings of Yu and Zeng (2026), who in a systematic review of English language education recorded a positive impact of DST on language acquisition, motivation, autonomy, collaborative competence and digital literacy. At the same time, the results of our review allow us to clarify this position: the language effect most often occurs not in isolation, but in

combination with the narrative organization of content, multimodal message construction and interaction between participants. A similar logic is confirmed by Zhang (2026), who showed that narrative-based vlogging contributes to the development of fluency, grammatical accuracy, lexical richness and narrative competence. Therefore, the effectiveness of DST should be associated not only with additional language practice, but with the need to transform content into a structured, audience-addressed narrative.

The second important result concerns the high representation of the social-communicative block. It confirms that collaboration is not an auxiliary organizational condition, but one of the key mechanisms of DST. Yu and Wang (2025) showed that in the training of future English teachers, digital storytelling contributed to the simultaneous development of language learning, digital skills and digital collaboration. Their approach, based on Activity Theory, explains our result: social communication is formed through the distribution of roles, coordination of decisions, exchange of digital resources and joint development of the final narrative. Therefore, assessing DST only through individual language indicators is not enough.

The social-communicative potential of DST, however, is not limited to intra-group collaboration. Wang and Hu (2025a) found positive changes in EFL students' intercultural competence, particularly in intercultural knowledge and self-efficacy. This is consistent with our interpretation of digital stories as addressed communicative utterances. When creating a story, the student not only uses English, but also represents a cultural position, selects semiotic resources for a specific audience, and correlates his or her own interpretation with the possible positions of others. At this level, social communication moves from ordinary interaction to cultural mediation.

The significant presence of multimodal and narrative mediation also requires separate interpretation. Wang (2025b) showed that multimodal digital storytelling combines reading, speaking, writing, translation and digital literacy with critical thinking and collaborative activities. This confirms our conclusion that multimodality is not a decorative component of digital storytelling. It changes the way meaning is constructed: the student must coordinate text, voice, visual images, video and other resources, taking into account the response of the addressee. Thus, multimodal mediation becomes a functional link

between linguistic performance and social communication.

The motivational dimension presented in the study by Temel and Yılmaz (2025) also fits with the overall positive picture. The authors found a significant increase in motivation to learn English among students who worked with digital storytelling. However, our thematic synthesis shows that motivation should be interpreted as a favorable condition, rather than as a direct indicator of social communication. High interest in digital tasks does not in itself prove the development of the ability to negotiate, collective meaning-making, or intercultural interaction.

The practical significance of this conclusion is that it is not enough for a teacher to offer students to technically create a video or a digital story. The communicative effect occurs when the task involves a joint interpretation, the need to argue for a choice, agree on a narrative position and adapt the message to the audience. Otherwise, DST may remain an individual multimedia product without a distinct socio-communicative function. This distinction is especially important for the methodological design of English language and literature classes in higher education.

The most important contradiction remains the weak representation of the literary component. Only 16.0% of the analyzed works directly integrated the literary text, although linguistic, collaborative and multimodal aspects are presented much more widely. Even new studies from 2025–2026 mainly focus on speaking, motivation, collaboration, intercultural competence, digital literacy and narrative competence, but do not sufficiently explain how DST changes social interaction specifically during the interpretation of English-language literature. This indicates a structural gap in the current evidence base.

The results obtained allow us to conceptualize digital storytelling as a multi-level mechanism of social communication, which includes linguistic formulation, narrative organization of content, multimodal recoding, collective agreement of meanings and addressing the completed story to the audience. At the same time, the review has limitations: the corpus consisted of 25 publications, thematic categories overlapped, and the heterogeneity of designs and indicators did not allow statistically combining effects. Further research should test this model on the material of English-language literary texts, especially

through the analysis of real group interaction, multimodal mediation and the quality of literary interpretation. It is this direction that directly follows from the identified gap and forms the basis for the conclusions of the study.

CONCLUSIONS

A structured review of 25 scientific publications from 2022–2026 identified digital storytelling as a multi-component tool for social communication in the process of learning English language and literature. The thematic synthesis revealed uneven research attention: 72.0% of the analyzed works covered language performance, 68.0% – social-communicative interaction, 64.0% – multimodal and narrative mediation, while only 16.0% directly integrated literary material.

It has been established that the communicative potential of digital storytelling is formed through the interaction of several mechanisms. Linguistic production ensures the verbalization of content; narrative organization provides the message with logical and semantic integrity; multimodal mediation involves the recoding of meaning through text, audio and visual resources; collaborative activity creates conditions for negotiations about content, the distribution of roles and joint decision-making. The audience orientation of digital storytelling, in turn, enhances the social nature of speech activity.

At the same time, the established weak representation of the literary component indicates a significant scientific gap. The available research is much better at explaining the impact of digital storytelling on speaking, writing, vocabulary, collaboration, and digital literacy than at explaining its ability to provide a shared interpretation of an English-language literary text.

It is practically advisable to use digital storytelling not as an individual multimedia task, but as a structured collaborative activity that includes text interpretation, discussion, scenario planning, multimodal construction, and presentation of the story to the audience.

The limitations of the study are related to the information base of 25 publications, the lack of meta-analysis, the heterogeneity of samples and research designs, and the partial intersection of thematic categories. Further studies should experimentally test the proposed model on the material of English-language fiction, separately measuring language

productivity, group interaction, multimodal mediation, and the quality of literary interpretation.

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